

BORN FOR THE JOB

Interim President Robert Glidden brings a Broad Background Well-Suited to Cal Poly

By Stacia Momburg



He may only be our interim president, but Robert Glidden brings a background that seems tailor made for Cal Poly.

Growing up on an Iowa farm, showing an early interest in math and science, and finally studying and teaching music for decades, Glidden's personal and professional biography reflects many of the keystones of Cal Poly's broad academic palette. Plus, there's his service in higher education administration that culminated in 10 years as president of Ohio University. ([Read Glidden's full biography here.](#))

Glidden, 74, became Cal Poly's interim leader Aug. 1, following the retirement of President Emeritus Warren J. Baker.

Glidden came out of retirement because he was intrigued by the university's academic reputation, he said – and by the prospect of living and working on the West Coast.

"It's something I had never done," he said. "And now, as I've begun to get acquainted with the university and its people, I'm more and more pleased. I made the right decision."

Glidden's journey began in Greene County, Iowa, where his father taught him the family business on their farm. When Glidden was still a high schooler, he said, his father gave

him a heifer.

"I had to care for it, pay my father breeding fees and sell the bulls and steers. I made enough money to pay for college and I had a \$50 scholarship. Tuition was \$78 per semester and \$550 per year room and board," he said, laughing at the amount. "Back then, you could buy the fanciest Ford for \$1,800."

When it came time to go to college his choices were either pursuing an engineering degree at Iowa State University, just 35 miles from home, or heading three hours away to the University of Iowa for a degree in music.

"Engineering was something I considered because of my love of math and science," he said. "The fact is, though, that I had more confidence in my ability as a musician. Besides that, half my friends went to Iowa State and were flunking out. I've never been sorry about my decision."

He was groomed as a college woodwind teacher by his professor, Himie Voxman. A well-known music educator, Voxman transcribed and published chamber music for woodwinds and was co-author of several Rubank method books for woodwinds and brass instruments – books that are still used today. ([Read more about Voxman here.](#))

"I was fortunate that Himie took a personal interest in me," Glidden said. "It made a difference in my education and ultimately my career."

At age 36 he was recruited to head the National Association of Schools of Music in Washington, D.C. Glidden said the experience provided him with a national perspective on education. However, he left the job three years later because something was missing.

"Working at the NASM was almost like earning another graduate degree. The problem was that I missed the vitality of a campus," he said.



Fall 2010

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At the time he was recruited for a dean's position at Bowling Green University. Having led an organization of about 400 schools and departments of music, being a dean seemed like the next logical career challenge.

The would-be engineer cum sax player likes being an administrator because, he said "I like to make things work, and I enjoy working with people."

Glidden's landing on campus couldn't be more perfectly timed as Cal Poly completes its strategic plan and continues its bid for reaccreditation. He is the former chairman of the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation, and the founding chairman of the Council on Higher Education Accreditation.

"Cal Poly's strategic vision of being a 21st century comprehensive polytechnic university is exceptionally strong and aligns beautifully with the themes, goals and metrics of the WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges) Self-Study," he said.

So what does the former Ohio University president hope to realistically do while here? "Hopefully, no harm," he said, grinning. "Seriously, I intend to make decisions supported by people who know the institution, its history and culture better than I do."

He wants to help the university prepare for a new permanent president by making decisions that the campus community feels confident a new president will embrace.

"I'm committed to leave Cal Poly just a little bit better than when I arrived," he said, "even though my time here is short."

Mostly, though, Glidden is looking forward to meeting students.

"I like sitting down with 15 to 20 students to discuss topics and issues that are important to them. They have to be our No. 1 focus, as administrators; they are the reason we're here."



ON THE AGENDA

In a recent speech at Cal Poly's Fall Conference, Glidden noted several goals he'd like to see the university meet prior to his departure.

The first, and in Glidden's opinion the most important, is the selection of a new permanent president. The search committee appointed by California State University Chancellor Charles B. Reed and the Board of Trustees begins its work immediately, with plans to announce a new president Dec. 13. On-campus interviews are scheduled for the week after Thanksgiving.

Glidden went on to suggest additional goals and tasks he believes should take place prior to the new president's appointment.

"I'd like to see us align learning objectives for every program and ideally every course within the program with the university learning objectives," he said. "Second, we need to clearly define who we are as a comprehensive polytechnic university. And third, we will seek a clear definition of the teacher-scholar model as we see it at Cal Poly."

Also on the agenda for 2010-11 is improving information security in the centrally controlled network and working with departments to implement security standards and support them with appropriate tools and services.

Academically, Glidden wants the campus to continue to seek ways to help students facing the many necessary challenges Cal Poly puts before them.

"Students admitted to Cal Poly have the tools necessary to succeed, but not all have those tools in equal measure," he said. "Our challenge is to match our efforts of help to those who need them most, and that will require unprecedented team work."

Finally, the interim president wants to seek broader collaboration across campus.

"Someone asked me recently what one thing I would like to change if I could accomplish it in the brief time I'll be at Cal Poly," he said. "That one thing would be to break down the silos so that we're all cognizant of this being one university."

"I don't say that because Cal Poly has more silos than other large universities. I say it because it's true of universities in general. Part of that has to do with specialization within disciplines and with modern technology, which allows and even encourages people to have closer relationships with colleagues in their own discipline around the globe than with colleagues of other disciplines on their own campus."

"I would like us all to wear bigger hats and to think of ourselves as one great university team."

"Few people will say no when you ask them for help, and collaboration is after all a two-way street," Glidden said.